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ABSTRACT

This monograph provides a schema that educators can use to help make the behavior of children and young people more sensitive to the intricacies of the world in which they learn and develop. Features include: (1) a review of the literature on the key issues facing teachers; (2) information on developmentally related discipline issues; (3) an ecological framework for use in considerations of discipline and student behavior; and (4) a look at some proposed strategies for better responding to discipline in the school and at home. A major purpose of the monograph is to promote a more accurate concept of what discipline is with respect to student behavior. Key areas examined are the ecological framework of discipline, prevention of disruptive behavior, relating and responding to behavior problems in effective ways, and strategies for supporting prosocial development in children and youth. Concluding discussion focuses on factors beyond the classroom that influence the ecology of student behavior. These include schoolwide leadership, the district's curriculum framework, school-community relationships, community attitudes and resources, and the society's value system. Each factor is explored in terms of its potential for strengthening the student's position in the development and learning process. Seventy-eight references are listed. (RH)

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Discipline:

Toward Positive Student Behavior

by Kevin J. Swick

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Discipline:

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by Kevin J. Swick

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PREFACE

With the arrival of a new decade, the status of student behavior in the classroom has taken on many new dimensions. Several aspects of the topic have changed dramatically: sources of student behavior have become more complex; theoretical and research perspectives are more diverse; and societal conditions in which children learn behavior are clearly more influential (35).* The emergence of drug-abused babies, a continuing rise in homeless children, and marked increases in poverty among children are just a few examples of the increasing complexity of the "sources of behavior" syndrome many children are experiencing.

Likewise, the theoretical and research foundation of sound discipline practices has acquired a new framework with the emergence of the ecological school of thought. The cause-effect thinking of the 1970s and 1980s is giving way to more valuable insights on how human behavior develops (60). Research insights related not only to the sources of behavior but also to the prevention of disruptive and antisocial living patterns have offered teachers and parents some new tools for supporting children's prosocial development. Finally, the effects of antisocial behavior on the community have created a renewed interest in supporting ways to promote more productive behaviors in children and young people—in school, at home, and in the community.

Within this new and more volatile context of the present, then, this monograph, *Discipline: Toward Positive Student Behavior*, is presented as a schema for making the future behavior of children and young people more sensitive to the intricacies of the world in which they learn and develop. Particular features of this monograph are a current review of the literature on the key issues facing teachers; information on developmentally related discipline issues; an ecological framework for use in considering discipline and student behavior; and a look at some new proposed strategies for better responding to discipline in the school and at home.

*Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Bibliography beginning on page 29.

INTRODUCTION

Poorly conceived ideas are often used even though their utility is obviously limited. This is certainly true of the way many people perceive and act on concepts of discipline. The distorted notion that one human being can "discipline" another is a classic example of this distortion process. To discipline is to take steps or actions to guide one's own behavior in relation to various conditions in the environment (27). A major purpose of this monograph is to promote a more accurate concept of what discipline is with respect to student behavior. In line with this purpose, the monograph reviews the most recent research on the ecology of student behavior with regard to its application in the home and school, and ultimately in the community. Key areas of the *discipline-behavior-growth triad* examined are the ecological framework of discipline; sources of behavior; early warning signals of antisocial behavior; early prevention of disruptive behavior; relating and responding to behavior problems in effective ways; and strategies for supporting prosocial development in children and young people.

DISCIPLINE: AN ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Far too often discipline is viewed in a limited framework—both in the sense of physical space and the event-time context. Yet, discipline is a continuous process individuals develop and refine over a lifetime. Informal discussions with teachers and other helping professionals during the 1960s and 1970s led researchers toward a new arena of study: assessing the ecology of student discipline within a developmental framework (6, 61). Twenty years of research have helped to redefine the context for carrying out discipline practices in schools and in other developmental systems. While people had correctly assumed that discipline was a process whereby individuals, in interaction with their environment, acquired a behavior syndrome that served to guide their actions, little was known about the intricacies of this interactional process. With the emergence of an ecological perspective on the development of human behavior and its application to studying the evolution of both healthy and unhealthy behaviors, new insights have been articulated for use by parents and teachers (6).

One of these insights is that particular events and experiences in life promote or impede the individual's development of self-discipline (38, 40). Further, it is now known that when these significant experiences become a part of the person's continuing development, they also become the primary source of that person's discipline system (48). The following

comment by a high school student who was about to check in for drug rehabilitation is insightful:

> It's all over the place, the stuff. I know now that I have to be the one that stops it. No one else really cares; no one else has ever really cared. But that's not to say I am blaming anyone but me—it's just been hard the whole way. If only someone had said *you can't go with them ever.*

Behind this mask of drug addiction is a "family mask" of three divorces, seven different homes, and many drug parties held within these varied family compositions—all taking place in an upper-middle-class social system. In this case, drugs simply became the symbol of what this young person had lived with for many years: chaos and confusion.

Unlike past views on discipline influences, the ecological perspective accounts for more than one-dimensional schemes. Certainly poverty increases the potential for antisocial behavior, but it alone is not a determining factor. Nor is divorce, unemployment, social isolation, or a myriad of other obvious elements. Yet, within the ecology of human behavior, researchers have identified some significant patterns of life that dramatically influence the way children and young people learn and develop. Wilson and Herrnstein (77), for example, have noted the significant relationship between an adult's criminal lifestyle and an unhealthy emotional and cognitive development during the early and middle childhood years. An ecological pattern of unhealthy family life, poor school performance, antisocial behavior early in life, continuing school failure, and an expanding repertoire of criminal-like behaviors appears as a common thread of the hard-core criminal's past life.

Burchard and Burchard (8) and Wallerstein and Blakeslee (71) report additional evidence that the ecology of discipline is centered in the person's early family and biological development experiences. For example, bitter divorces seem to impact the child's conception of self and self-other relationships in negative ways for many years. The coherence in one's life system is destroyed, leaving a vacuum of insecurity and anger (71, 74). This ecology of family deterioration is usually further damaged by a loss of income, a decrease in the family's psychological resources, and the presence of new barriers to negotiating life's challenges. It is no surprise that children in such settings experience continuing problems at school, with their peers, and with their personal development of competence.

Self-discipline emerges best in environments where children and young people have access to caring, competent adults and the continuing guidance of these adults in the "meaning" of life (5, 6, 48). An elaboration of the "ecology of behavior" as it relates to the development of student discipline is instructive.

SOURCES OF BEHAVIOR: AN ECOLOGICAL VIEW

From an ecological view, student behavior has several sources that ultimately interact to form the individual's framework for learning and developing. While it is possible to discuss these sources individually, it should be kept in mind that they interact with each other and influence behavior in many ways (4). The individual's personal life system is of primary importance to the development of behavior patterns. It is known, for example, that children who are healthy, have positive living habits, and feel secure in their growth, are more successful in developing prosocial behaviors than children who lack these attributes (38). In effect, the biological and related life systems of the developing person establish the direction for interacting with the environment. For example, newborns who enter the world already ravaged by drugs certainly face the risk of having a seriously weakened life system. This is true for other infants and young children who, for various reasons, enter life with serious biological limitations or impediments (52). At the center of a person's responses to external behavior sources is the individual's system of control, a means of negotiating these events and relationships (40). To begin life with a limited control system because of difficulties at birth or failure of others to attend to basic health needs is traumatic to the child and certainly a detriment to full development.

Children and young people today confront a series of behavior sources not limited to the traditional issues and problems confronted in the past. For example, while families have never provided a utopian source for the development of prosocial behaviors, they have generally served as healthy and secure sources of learning and development (5, 33). Yet in today's families circumstances and conditions appear to be eroding whatever stability might exist in the young child's life system. The emergence of several intense and pervasive lifestyles, such as drug addiction, chaotic (constantly changing) family systems, crime families (families in which a cycle of criminal behavior is passed from one generation to the next), and rootless families (often identified as homeless), has negatively influenced the behavior patterns of children and young people. Even traditional family maladies such as poverty, single parenthood, and illiteracy have become compounded by new value strands that are emerging in the 1990s. One example is the contrast between past and current single-parent families. In the past, even in cases where single parenthood resulted from a divorce, the family's social and emotional infrastructure was generally secured for the benefit of the child; separating parents remained committed to doing what was best for the child in spite of their difficulties. While this was not true in all cases, it did represent an ethic of decision making for the common

good that existed in most families. Today single parenthood (which appears to be evolving to an even more dangerous level) is far too often seen as the remains of an emotional war zone. Caldwell (11) describes several cases where these remains have had a lasting negative influence on the children. Abuse, poverty, and emotional neglect are but a few of the conditions she describes.

Even in cases where two parents are heading the family, the conditions may well be similar to a war zone. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (71) describe family contexts where separation or divorce have yet to occur but where the socioemotional ecology is deadly. The ethical value of "doing for the common good" once prevalent (and most critical to children's healthy development) has, in most families, become sadly lacking as indicated by several conditions: failure of spouses to maintain child support payments, neglect of children's basic health needs, severe poverty during the child's earliest period of development, and a continuing increase in crime affecting children and young families (17, 32, 52).

Community and societal sources of behavior have also changed dramatically over the past decade: the safety net (a network of social services to protect children and families) once proposed as a means of securing the productive lives of young children has eroded steadily. Consider just the major changes: an increase in crime that affects children, continuing increases in child and spouse abuse, the dramatic rise of poverty among preschool-aged children, the emergence of new health problems and the rise in the incidence of familiar health problems such as malnutrition, and the increase in mental health problems in children and families (52, 69). Taken in isolation, any one of these problems certainly has a negative influence on children and young people; yet when students experience an "ecology" of detrimental influences, their behavior is clearly influenced in negative ways.

Disruptive student behavior is often rooted in this ecology of negative influences. Children and young people seek direction and guidance from the significant people in their environment. When these people are lacking or providing negative role modeling, the results are tragic. The combination of poverty, abuse, chaos, crime, and family dysfunction can impede children's understanding of how to function effectively in life. Discipline requires an ability to learn to control and direct one's behavior toward positive and productive ends. An ecology of antisocial elements is not conducive to the promotion of productive behavior (18, 40, 68).

Beyond the observable sources of behavior are the many dimensions of emotional stress today's students experience. This stress, for many students, begins early in life and may not be immediately seen as a source of difficulty. For example, Rist (53) reports that while crack

babies have various physical maladies at birth (the most prevalent being low birth weight), the most damaging stress may well be the impaired system for coping, developing unhealthy attachments, and related affective and cognitive dysfunctions. Similar damage occurs when children and young people are confronted with a myriad of family-school-community stressors: "success stress," unrealistic parent or teacher expectations, peer pressures, environmental stress (which may well be most prevalent in schools), and other pressures—all of which can become negative sources of student behavior (22, 31, 73).

While productive adults have had time and experience to develop an ecology of effective functioning, students are forming their identity. They seek out role models who appear to have a repertoire of affective behaviors for guidance and direction (6, 23, 34, 60). An ecology of development that is dominated by negative forces (for example, alcoholism, abuse, excessive rigidity, and dysfunctional living patterns) that are pervasive in the student's life greatly increases the possibilities of antisocial behavior (6, 16, 40, 61). Burchard and Burchard point to the key factors in this ecology that emerge as lasting impediments:

> Structure and strong social bonds were absent in the lives of most at-risk children who had a delinquency record in adolescence ... (8, p. 30) Crucial for these youths was not the experience of failure per se, but loss of control over reinforcement, a perceived lack of synchrony between their actions and feedback from the environment. (8, p. 31)

Thus, the ecology of disruptive student behavior is deeply rooted in the interactional experiences of children (self-environment). Werner states it well:

> Optimal adaptive development appears to be characterized by a balance between the power of the person and the power of his or her social and physical environment. (74, p. 38)

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR: EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

One benefit of an ecological view of studying disruptive behavior is that researchers have identified factors during the early childhood years that can be seen as warning signals. Where these signals have been responded to effectively, the lives of children were nurtured toward success. Three warning signals that are too prevalent in our societal structure are poverty among our youngest children, children's detachment from empowering adults, and pressures for children to abandon the natural order of childhood (18).

Sadly, our nation leads all nations in the percentage of children in poverty. Over 25 percent of children birth–six years are growing up in

families where the income is below the poverty line (17). The consequences of childhood poverty have been consistently related to the roots of maladaptive behavior: malnutrition, severe health problems, delayed cognitive and social growth, poor housing, child abuse, and a variety of other erosive influences (7, 21, 78). Under the stress of poverty and its many debilitating effects, many adults are "detaching" from their children during the most critical period of human development (18).

The combination of many forces has left children with little continuing contact with empowering adults. For example, it is estimated that by 1995 over 15 million preschool children will need some form of supplemental out-of-home care. Add to this factor the reality that by 1992 over 25 percent of children will be living in one-parent households (56). As Dimidjian states:

> Fragmented human relationships—whether in homes or in preschools, child care centers or classrooms—cannot promote the psychological stability and adaptive coping that young children desperately need when they are undergoing difficult events like family discord, divorce, or economic stress. (18, p. 18)

Childhood exists for a purpose: to allow children the freedom from excessive pressures so that they can develop positive self-images to function effectively later in the adult world with its many demands. The continuing erosion of childhood is a clear warning signal that our children's behavior is likely to become more chaotic and aggressive (58). Two particularly damaging influences that appear to be gaining in strength: adult expectations for children to perform roles for which they are not developmentally ready; and the overloading of children with adult concerns and lifestyles (6). When carried to extremes these sources of behavior destroy children's identity as growing, positive persons. As Swick states:

> A cold, hostile, and mechanistic ecology is sure to produce an anxiety-ridden child. A strong identity is possible only when people have role models they can learn from. (60, p. 20)

Recent research (6, 18, 60) identifies many attributes that provide parents and teachers with warning signals of the possible emergence of disruptive or even antisocial behavior. It is important to note that while the existence of these attributes is likely in the lives of most children, it is their intensity and pervasiveness that is or should be cause for alarm. For example, all children will have episodes of aggression. It is persistent and intense aggressiveness that must be viewed with alarm (11, 22, 55). Magid and McKelvey identify the following attributes of character-disturbed children:

- Lack of ability to give and receive attention

- Self-destructive behavior
- Cruelty to others
- Phoniness
- Severe problems with stealing, hoarding and gorging of food
- Speech pathology
- Marked control problems
- Lack of friends
- Angry and hostile parents
- Preoccupation with fire, blood, gore
- Various types of learning disorders
- Constant lying (44, pp. 12–14)

The ecology of "antisocial personality disorder" (22) is rooted in unheeded behavior signals warning that something is seriously wrong. These signals are not sporadic moments of cruelty or periodic discipline problems, but consistent antisocial acts. Attempted childhood suicides, parental abuse by children, constant cruelty, gross hyperactivity, or excessive withdrawal are symptoms of disturbed behavior that promise to become not only disruptive of school learning but destructive of societal needs (30).

EARLY PREVENTION THROUGH HOME-SCHOOL STRATEGIES

Research and practice carried out since 1965 point to the powerful influence of early prevention strategies to help children achieve a positive beginning in life (18, 55). This is especially true with respect to children's development of prosocial behaviors. Research carried out at various points in the life cycle (16, 71, 77) offers several insights into the prevention of disruptive and antisocial behavior syndromes. Important factors include parental competence, family harmony, early cognitive and language development experiences, family spirituality, preventive child and family counseling, and early health and physical care (8, 48, 52, 64).

Parental competence has been related to children's development of social competence (75). The absence of parent involvement or gross negligence has been related to children's early development of antisocial behavior syndromes (77). The most critical elements "missing" in children who show early signs of antisocial and maladaptive behavior are an attachment to their parents and the formation of the concept of conscience, especially concerning the relation of their behavior to that of others (8). Children who lack positive and effective adult role models appear to have great difficulty in delaying gratification and solving problems in productive ways (11).

School- and community-sponsored parent education strategies are focusing on reaching parents as early as the birth of the first child (48, 49, 55). These efforts focus on providing parents with information and support services that help them achieve parental growth and development (25). Research results on the effectiveness of these programs is promising; parents do increase their knowledge and competence about parenting and appear to use it in their relationships with their children (49).

An extension or corresponding attribute related to children's prosocial behavior is family harmony. Synchrony among family members acts as a force of security and nurturance—both of which are critical to children's acquisition of constancy (an ability to develop stability in behavior in spite of periodic changes in the environment). Severe disharmony has been related to various student behavior problems: aggression, passivity, poor academic performance, truancy, and failure (37, 54, 71).

In addition to parental education, school and community strategies that are proving useful in promoting family harmony include counseling, early involvement in family therapy, more flexible and supportive work and social practices, and a myriad of community- and church-sponsored family wellness programs (5, 18). The emphasis in these programs has been to create within the family a sensitive and responsive ecology where children and adults can function in growing, productive ways. In particular, Family Centers are proving to be helpful places that use counseling, child care, and related family services to support positive family beginnings (49).

Severe delays in early language and cognitive development make young children vulnerable both academically and socially. Early school failure and disruptive student behavior are interrelated and are correlated with inadequate cognitive and language functioning (44, 55). Further, when these delays are not attended to, they become pervasive issues in the person's life, often serving as precursors of continuing school failures, delinquency, and a host of debilitating factors in young adulthood (8, 77).

Early intervention programs, such as quality preschool child development, parent training, language-promoting home learning efforts, and family-centered early childhood support programs, have proven to be effective prevention systems (61, 62, 64). Recent innovative programs such as Parents As Teachers (Missouri), Family-Oriented Early Childhood Education (Minnesota), and Target 2000 Parent Education (South Carolina) concentrate on early education through parent- and family-based strategies (49). Research indicates that these programs are effective not only in preventing academic failure but also in furthering lifelong social behaviors that promote success

syndromes (for example, completion of high school and gainful employment) (76).

The development of healthy children is strongly influenced by what might be called family spirituality (11). For example, studies of healthy families have consistently pointed to the multiple benefits of a spiritual core in family living. These include the development in children of social and moral concepts and behaviors (64). The sense of being nurtured, guided, and cared for that typically comes from parents who have spirituality seems to offer children a meaning to their early lives. This spirituality is not to be confused with the rigid schemes that may permeate formalized belief systems; rather, it is the ethical, spiritual, and social fabric of a way of life that promotes in children a sense of trust and decency in their world (3).

While schools are not in the business of promoting particular belief systems, they can and should promote in families the universal values of harmony and decency that are so vital to children's development of positive behavior patterns. Simple parent and family activities such as spending time together, sharing enjoyable experiences together, and planning for regular communication with each other are some of the many family rituals that support children's healthy development (64).

All families confront problems during their formative period of development. Yet, dysfunctional families seem to generate many behavioral maladies in young children (37, 38). Left unchecked, these maladies can evolve into highly destructive behavior patterns. They can influence the lives of several generations, as is known to be the case in child abuse situations (9, 44, 48). Preventive parent and family counseling practices are effective in supporting parents in setting a positive direction for the family's functioning. Schools, civic groups, churches, and social support agencies are collaborating on using preventive counseling and educational strategies to promote healthy family development. For example, many family centers now include an early childhood family counseling component (15). Through child development and preschool parenting programs, many schools are also capitalizing on this educational and support process (49).

Poor health and inadequate nutrition have been linked to various social maladies. It may seem odd that young children born in the 1990s are more at risk healthwise than those born 40 years ago. Reed and Sauter (51) tell of a disastrous scene regarding the physical health of today's children: 12 million children have no health insurance, nearly half of all poor children do not receive benefits from Medicaid, only two pregnant women in four receive prenatal care, and all but one of our nation's health goals have not been achieved. The encouraging side of this situation is that some schools and communities are integrating health and developmental care into comprehensive efforts to reach

families during the early years. For example, as a part of South Carolina's Target 2000 Parent Education programs, developmental and health services must be provided (57).

It has been estimated that as much as 80 percent of severe disruptive and antisocial behavior could be prevented through early identification and treatment (18, 52). The redeployment of human services to support the development of healthy families during the 1990s must receive top priority from school and community leaders.

RELATING TO BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS FROM A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Many disruptive student behaviors are directly related to their developmental context. Teachers can deal more effectively with such discipline problems by understanding the issues common to various stages of development as well as by pursuing individual sources of disruptive behavior. While most developmental sources of behavior occur across all ages, the intensity with which they occur at certain periods warrants their recognition. Awareness of these developmental attributes can increase teachers' skills in dealing with disruptive behavior.

During the early childhood years, for example, three developmental threads will influence children's behavior patterns markedly: the desire for self-recognition; the need for physical engagement in their environment; and the desire to maintain close, intimate relationships with important adults (at the same time that they are making probes toward becoming autonomous) (15, 19). The natural desire to gain self-recognition may be misinterpreted as disruptive when in actuality it is only a probe by the child to be seen as important by others. "Watch me!" "See me!" and "I can!" behaviors are indicators of this early developmental need. Engaging young children in activities where they gain recognition is the best response to this situation (19, 23).

An abundance of child development research strongly suggests that children need many physical experiences in the environment as they learn and grow (11, 23, 58). Adults who erroneously expect children to attend to abstract, nonphysical learning for long periods of time are creating discipline problems. It is through this physical knowledge of things that children acquire cognitive, language, and social learning. As Elkind (22) points out, many early childhood stressors are related to adult misconceptions about how children learn and develop. For example, children's natural interest in manipulating physical objects may be misconstrued as disruptive. While they certainly need to develop

listening skills, this is best accomplished in a responsive, supportive adult-child relationship (19, 22, 23).

Proactive and positive-oriented children seem to emerge best in environments where the adults are close to them in a guiding, supportive manner. Children have a strong need for intimate relationships with parents and teachers; yet they want opportunities to grow through the development of self-management experiences. Young children who are constantly seeking attention, who are extremely fearful of change or overly reactive to new situations, may be reflecting a serious imbalance in their family's relationship pattern or insecurity in the classroom (11).

A child's entry into the intermediate school years brings with it new developmental concerns: a desire for attaining competence, a need for visible signs of acceptance within the family and the school, and a tendency to see life's ironies in negative ways (14, 29, 56).

In some respects the intermediate years bring with them both an internal desire for competence and societal pressures for signals of achievement. These two influences may heighten a student's exhibitions of aggression or intense physical displays. This behavior seems to take on even more intensity in peer group situations (22, 23, 34). Families and schools that offer children a variety of avenues for achieving "competence indicators" report fewer disruptive behavior problems (6, 8). Further, parents and teachers who create outlets for student talents in response to children's signals of distress about competence factors are effective in resolving disruptive behavior syndromes (1, 55, 69).

Related to this need for competence is the child's corresponding desire for acceptance as an important part of the family and the school (27, 35). Children at this stage of development see acceptance in very concrete terms: being listened to, having access to the family's system of communication, and being recognized as an important person in the classroom. While the child's search for acceptance may take on a quiet form, the absence of acceptance brings forth many antisocial behaviors: severe inattentiveness, failure to complete school work, and an unwillingness to comply with school or family rules (60, 61, 63, 66). A case in point is the fourth grader who is constantly seeking attention, focusing on the inadequacies of others. A brief review of the dysfunctional family in which he or she is striving for security enlightens one's perspective and should serve as a signal for parent-teacher efforts to create a more competence-supportive environment (71). A similar dysfunctional behavior syndrome often appears in children who are homeless, who live in drug-abusing families, or who are victims of neglectful or violent parents. (55, 68, 69).

The completion of the cycle of childhood usually brings with it some sense of grief and fear. In reaction to these feelings, children may seem especially negative and pessimistic in their philosophical orientation

(23, 56). Strong reactions to these feelings by parents and teachers may only add more stress to an already volatile situation (23, 56). Providing supportive and sensitive guidance that also establishes clear limits has been effective in helping children cope with these insecurities (5, 26, 27).

The middle school years mark both an ending and a beginning; childhood orientations are transformed into more adult-like behaviors (although they may seem like anything but that) (23, 26, 39). Rapid physical growth, emotional peaks and valleys, the onset of pubescence, a strong need for peer acceptance, and the need for self-reliance are some of the attributes of this stage of development. During this period, students are neither children nor adults; they usually shift back and forth between an identified set of roles. Their behaviors seem to run to extremes: clothing choices, for example, may reflect a leap toward full adulthood one day and a regression to childhood the next (23, 34, 37). Parents and teachers observe more disruptive behavior in this age group. However, much of what may appear to be disruptive often consists of developmentally related attributes. With a real desire to explore the limits of adulthood, middle schoolers often exceed the boundaries of what adults consider acceptable (23, 34). Strategies that can help students make this transitional period a positive experience include patience, humor, empathy, and guidance. Added pressures from excessive family stressors or rigid school structures not only impede middle schoolers' development but may also heighten their already stressed status (22).

Adolescence and young adulthood are the culmination phases of early identity development (22, 23, 34). It is during this period of life that students struggle with the issues of who am I? who do I want to be? and how can I get there? A highly volatile period of life, to say the least: high delinquency rates, increased suicide rates, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and school dropout are some of the antisocial responses of students to the stressors they are experiencing (33, 34, 61, 69). Close adult supervision combined with supportive opportunities for students to develop their interests and explore their emerging selfhood are the most effective ways of promoting prosocial behaviors (34). Adult supervision, while on the surface seemingly less important during these years, is actually needed more than ever at this crucial period. The high incidence of delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and drug-related behavior is more a testament to a lack of adequate "passages" of work and meaning than a reflection of inadequacies in our youth (17, 76).

No single stage of development stands alone; each interacts with the other and is heavily influenced by events and experiences prevalent in the growing person's life. Supportive families, strong parental guidance, proactive schools, sensitive teachers, and viable communities provide

the needed structures for making these developmental periods positive forces in students' lives (22, 55).

RESPONDING TO BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN POSITIVE WAYS

Considerable research indicates that adult responses to student behavior problems can play a major role in either resolving the problems or promoting further disruptive behavior (42, 43). Both teacher behaviors and particular discipline strategies can be used as positive means for responding to student behavior problems.

Responsive Teacher Behaviors

Effective teacher responses (both preventive and problem solving) to student behaviors can establish a setting that promotes prosocial living. Students look for direction from adults; that is, they are usually responsive to the kind of environment established by the teacher (64). Five teacher behaviors that have been associated with successful classroom management and discipline are modeling, designing, interacting, responding, and assessing. In various ways (and in interaction with each other) these behaviors represent an ecology of classroom discipline.

What teachers do is more powerful than any verbal input they may provide students. In effect, the *modeling* of effective classroom discipline behaviors is a proven strategy for preventing and resolving student behavior problems (20, 27, 42). People typically adopt the style of interaction and functioning modeled by the person who is leading or guiding the environment. Thus, inconsistent teachers usually invite student behavior patterns that are erratic or even chaotic (42). Similarly, teachers who are rigid and/or unresponsive to student needs invite high levels of stress, which, in turn, increases the potential for disruptive behavior (52, 60, 63). Research suggests that the following teacher behaviors best support the development of prosocial living in children and young people:

- establishing positive and pleasant relationships with students
- managing well-organized classrooms
- providing clear and consistent direction for student behavior
- exhibiting responsive attitudes toward student interests and concerns
- encouraging student involvement in solving problems. (63)

The classroom is an environment that by design influences student behavior. Poorly designed classrooms can encourage student discipline problems. For example, environments that are overcrowded and that

lack space for students to move from one activity to another increase the likelihood of problems. Research indicates that students are more likely to behave inappropriately in classrooms that have no physical lines of movement than in those that have clearly defined limits. Teachers and students need time to see and interact with each other if they are to form positive relationships (20, 22).

Another part of the well-designed classroom is the social and psychological climate. This element can promote positive actions or encourage disruptive behavior. When students are able to find a place where they are valued, have chances for positive interactions with others, and can develop their individual talents, they usually are positive in their behavior. Studies on disruptive behavior indicate that such students exhibit negative responses when they are neither valued nor made a part of the classroom process. This seems to be most evident in student behavior syndromes where drug abuse and adolescent suicide are prevalent (32, 43).

Teachers who systematically work at interacting with students have fewer discipline problems than do teachers who minimize their communication with students. This premise applies to nonverbal as well as verbal interaction between teachers and students. Observational studies of teacher behavior indicate that teachers interact more with students they like than with students they dislike, thus creating many behavior problems that could be avoided (12, 26, 72, 75). Students have reported to counselors, parents, and researchers the positive reinforcement that they received when a teacher took the time to focus on something they accomplished. To be ignored, treated as a slow learner, or isolated from classroom events does not foster positive student behavior. When teachers alter their classroom interaction patterns for the positive, they have a very positive influence on student behavior. Teacher interaction patterns that seem to prompt positive student reaction include the use of "we" statements, contact with students while they are working, and the use of gestures that indicate to students that they are valued (19, 26, 31, 37).

The formation of student behaviors is in large part due to the way that adults respond to their early attempts at behavior. Positive behaviors are not achieved all at once; they are the result of continuous involvement with supportive and guiding adults. Learning productive behavior is a process in which people refine and extend their skills based on positive feedback from trusting and supportive others. This process, as it occurs in the classroom, depends upon teacher responses that both guide students toward prosocial outcomes and support them in learning about themselves (12, 20, 27, 60). Certainly situations arise in the classroom that require firm and authoritative responses, yet most of these incidents can be avoided by continuing positive involvement with students.

It is no surprise that students who are assessed as academically weak also appear on "disruptive behavior lists." Likewise, it should not be surprising to find that teachers who assess their teaching behaviors periodically have fewer discipline problems than do those who hold to their cherished patterns of "teaching as I did last year." The assessment process, when used properly, can be a valuable method of making the classroom a meaningful place for everyone (59, 60). Teacher assessment of student learning is important because of the effect it can have on the direction set for helping students become productive and self-managed. Unfortunately, many assessment strategies are "deficiency oriented"; they often prompt students and teachers to focus on what they are lacking as opposed to supporting their total development and learning. The term *assessment* implies that we "take stock of" and "set a course with a more positive direction." Research shows that when assessment procedures are used to promote student development, the students most often respond by improving their behavior and school performance (1, 20, 62).

Responsive Strategies

Researchers have explored a variety of techniques to use in responding to classroom discipline situations. Given that educators place student behavior within the developmental and ecological contexts in which it occurs, there are several practices to explore for use in responding to problems (15, 20, 27, 62). It should be noted, however, that these practices should be related to the particular situation(s) in which they are to be used.

Prevention is still the most effective discipline strategy (50). Establishing a positive and well-organized program at the beginning of the school year can preclude many behavior problems. Using various means to communicate to children and parents your respect for students and the focus of your program is critical to beginning the school year on a positive note (12). Fair, reasonable, and clearly communicated "rules of living" in the classroom invite productive student behavior (62). Students want clear guidelines and direction on what is expected of them in the classroom and at home. In addition, when they are involved in setting these limits, they are more likely to see their meaning (27, 28).

Providing students with a positive example (teacher as role model) of how to behave and learn is indeed an excellent prevention strategy. The teacher who is well organized and enthusiastic about teaching is certain to infect at least some students with a similar desire to learn. According to research and teacher reports, teachers who listen to students, have a relevant program, and involve students in learning experiences

appropriate to their development have fewer behavior problems than do their less-involved counterparts (42). A part of this teacher modeling is the maintenance of order in the classroom. When problems occur, students look to the teacher for effective leadership. When problems occur and teachers resolve them as productively and sensibly as possible, it builds the students' level of confidence in both the teachers and the security of the classroom environment. Students respond positively to effective classroom management. This management process includes several elements: knowing the students one is teaching and their families; having a clear and well-organized plan of instruction; being cognizant of key management skills; and maintaining an inviting classroom environment (20, 27, 34, 60).

Seeking the source(s) of student behavior problems once order has been restored is essential to solving problems that may continue to impede the classroom ecology (55, 60, 62). Far too often a crisis management style is used in responding to discipline issues. Yet long-term order is best achieved when teachers assess the situation thoroughly. Was the behavior reflective of a continuing student problem? Is the student using his or her behavior to avoid dealing with the real problem? Am I as a teacher overreacting to behavior that is really a normal part of human development? Are conditions at school or home prompting students to be disruptive? Locating the sources of the problem and attending to them are responsive discipline strategies (20). Teachers have found continuous contact with parents and interaction with students in classroom and informal settings helpful in carrying out this process (60).

Continuous disruption by large numbers of students typically signifies that something is wrong in the classroom management system. It may be that the classroom is overcrowded or that available space is not being used properly (27, 28, 60, 63). Beyond reducing the number of students in the classroom, teachers can alter the environment by establishing small group learning teams, redesigning learning areas, or changing the seating arrangement. One change teachers have found effective is providing a place in the classroom where students step back from routine matters and think about their behavior. A time-out area of this nature can be helpful as a transitional strategy but must not be abused (60). Teachers also need a place in the school where they can go to retreat from the intense pressures of working with students (65, 66). Research clearly indicates that teacher burnout is responsible for many classroom discipline problems (66).

Students and teachers need to reflect on the *consequences of their behavior*. When a student can see the negative influences his or her behavior has on others, the potential for change is increased. Teachers must also come to realize that disorganized classrooms, poorly planned

instruction, and negative attitudes have a detrimental effect on student functioning in the classroom (42, 50, 65). Once students (or teachers) have recognized the sources and consequences of their behaviors, there are several strategies they can use to alter these behaviors. *Behavior modification* is one possibility. An effective way to use this procedure is to have students keep a daily log of their behavior. Some teachers use a check sheet. At the end of the day, they review the progress made by the student in eliminating undesirable behavior. Keep in mind that this is a transitional behavior management technique; the ultimate goal is for students to take more control of their lives (5, 20, 28).

Students are highly influenced by their peers. Through peer support groups and group counseling procedures many children and young people can acquire insights to help them redirect their energy toward positive outcomes (29, 31). Additional skills acquired in peer group support activities include the building of empathy, perspective taking, shared problem solving, and initiatives that prompt self-management skills. Group counseling and student dialogue sessions are especially useful in dealing with discipline concerns of common interest to most or all students. These experiences (when handled by a skilled professional) can be used to involve students in problem solving, strengthening their teaming skills, and to foster better relationships in the classroom (12, 14, 45, 62). A related strategy is that of teacher-focused invitational teaching. Self-concept research indicates that successful students are invited (from an early age) to participate in the learning process in a meaningful way (50). Research also indicates that while teachers have little difficulty in sending invitational messages to students they see as able, they are much less effective in doing this with disruptive students. The cycle of negative messages–negative behavior–negative messages must be replaced with a positive behavior cycle (42, 62). Two strategies that have proven useful in altering this cycle are avoiding the reinforcement of negative behaviors, and providing alternatives to undesirable behaviors (62).

By the very act of attending to a behavior pattern the teacher is unknowingly reinforcing it. Ignoring minor nuances and incidental classroom behaviors can often decrease their occurrence. Redirecting student behavior toward constructive involvement is an alternative way to avoid negative reinforcement. Cuing behavior (giving students subtle yet appealing suggestions on how to change their behavior) is an effective way to support students in acquiring positive ways of functioning (28, 61). Providing students with alternatives to disruptive behavior as a means of achieving their goals is also quite effective. Research indicates that providing alternative modes of learning and behaving strengthens student discipline and enriches the curriculum (25, 42). Students who are quite active, for example, might be engaged in

project-oriented learning as a way to direct their energy toward positive outcomes.

Teacher-parent partnerships to address classroom discipline concerns are perhaps the most effective strategy available to teachers. Research indicates that such partnerships have several benefits: they are a means of communicating to students the commitment of their significant adults to having a viable learning ecology; they prompt parental involvement in solving discipline problems; and they can be a way of strengthening the student's support system (61, 62). The absence of parental support of the child's development of social behaviors and skills is correlated with continuing discipline issues (8). In parent-absent families (whether physical or psychological absence), teachers will find mentoring to be a way to offer children and young people positive role models (3, 14, 31). The meaningful involvement of children and young people with productive adults can take many forms: tutoring programs, friendship networks, career-sharing activities, internships, and programs in which teacher cadets work with teacher-mentors (1, 34, 55).

In some cases student behavior patterns may have escalated to the point of being pathological. Such patterns of behavior are often evident in a student's inability to function in the group or in a hostile and aggressive interaction with peers and teachers. Usually, the student has a history of excessively destructive behaviors. This type of behavior has a negative influence on everyone in the learning environment. The classroom is not the place to attempt to resolve such serious behavior problems. The best course of action is to temporarily remove such students from the classroom and obtain for them the proper professional support. As these students achieve a higher level of mental health, they can be mainstreamed back into the classroom.

A SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ECOLOGY FOR POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

Beyond the classroom are several factors that influence the ecology of student behavior: schoolwide leadership, the district's curriculum framework, school-community relationships, community attitudes and resources, and the broader society's value system. The following pages explore each of these aspects of the human ecology and their potential for strengthening the student's position in the development and learning process.

The School Leadership Style

The school (and the larger system in which it functions) is an ecological system in which people are continuously influencing each

other's behavior (35). Within the school system itself, the school board and the superintendent have a major influence on discipline through the personnel they hire, the curricula they develop or drop, the policies they adopt, and many similar dimensions. These leadership decisions also carry a message in the way they are shaped—whether they use shared decision making or they are decided by a few persons. For example, a school system with limited curriculum resources, excessive class size, and unreasonably harsh discipline policies is certain to invite student behavior problems (30, 55). Many schools have limited financial resources and thus confront serious problems in trying to meet the diverse needs of students. However, effective leadership can capitalize on limited resources in ways that promote the best possible learning ecology (17). Typically, the philosophy established at the district level pervades the actions taken by building principals. Particular district-level actions that promote positive discipline include staff development oriented toward teacher preparation for carrying out supportive practices with students; initiation of programs that encourage student involvement in productive learning; philosophical and applied parent involvement and education efforts; and the acquisition of resources needed for effective teaching.

Research offers many insights into the relationship between leadership behaviors and positive student behavior:

- Leaders who are visible, supportive, and interact with students and teachers on a regular basis have fewer discipline problems than do leaders who isolate themselves (24).
- Shared leadership (decisions made by teacher-parent-student teams) has a very positive influence on student behavior (34, 39).
- Leadership that is open to input from all participants in the school-community setting and responsive to ideas put forth by the participants has a positive effect on students and teachers as well as an inviting influence on parents and citizens (60).
- When leaders have high expectations for students and teachers (and provide support to achieve them), students usually respond in positive and productive ways (50).
- Leadership that rewards positive behavior and focuses on the strengths of individuals usually receives high productivity from people (65).
- Leaders who are firm and yet fair and flexible in implementing school policies usually find that teachers and students are consistent and positive in their behavior (56).
- Leaders who are responsive to the needs of others and who attempt to accommodate such needs have a positive effect on the way students and teachers relate to each other (62).

- When leaders are predominantly characterized as counselors, listeners, problem solvers, and doers, they generally have settings in which positive human relations exist (62, 63).

The leadership style of the school establishes the expected behavior pattern. Settings where people are respected, made a part of the school, and given opportunities to behave responsibly are a result of productive leadership. In contrast, schools where people are treated as objects, constantly reminded to "stay in their place," and isolated from the decision-making process indicate ineffective leadership. A team approach is the most effective model for achieving positive discipline (61, 62).

The Curriculum and Discipline

The central mission of schools is to provide students with experiences that enable them to become literate and functional members of a democratic society. Providing students with the essential skills for living in any society is a continuous challenge. Even in a rural society where values were homogeneous, the challenge was difficult. In a global society where multiple value systems interact with each other and new technologies are continuously emerging, the challenge is even more complex (35). Added to this challenge is the current issue of equipping schools with resources needed to shape a future-oriented curriculum. A curriculum that is outdated, limited in scope, and unresponsive to student needs and interests is not only dangerous to society but invites many behavior problems. This situation also exists when classroom instruction is dull and lacking in relevance to student needs (60, 72).

In a culture where students are constantly bombarded with "me" messages that are directed toward immediate gratification, it is difficult to attract their attention to material that may appear to have little bearing upon their lives. However, curriculum designs that include the following at least assure that students have access to interesting and challenging material and experiences:

- They use analogies, thinking skills, and problem-solving materials and activities (55).
- They involve students in analyzing cultural and social experiences prevalent in their current lives (12).
- They relate current social problems and events to student needs and interests, and provide students with a comparison-and-contrast framework (39).
- They provide students with diverse ways of learning about essential concepts and skills, and experiment with various learning modes—visual, auditory, and tactile (61, 62).

- They combine study with practical life experiences so students can see the applicability of concepts to different contexts (42).
- They use technology resources wherever possible and appropriate; videodiscs, public television programs, and audio tools can greatly enhance the curriculum (63, 65).
- They involve students in computer learning from early in their schooling; this mode of instruction not only captures their interest but strengthens their total literacy skills (1).
- They integrate curriculum and instructional materials into thematic units, promoting a broad understanding among students of the interrelationship of different concepts (62).

A clear mismatch between instruction and student interests and abilities is an invitation for discipline problems. A rigid curriculum framework is inadequate to meet the diverse needs of students. Many disruptive students are also confronting curriculum-related problems. An experience-based curriculum that is accompanied by guided learning processes can be effective in helping students achieve a sense of competence. Involving students in selecting and/or designing certain aspects of curriculum is yet another way of promoting positive student attitudes toward school. In effect, instructional programs that are too abstract in content, poorly organized, unrelated to student needs and abilities, and lacking in coherence are among the major causes of disruptive behavior (1).

A Community Ecology for Positive Student Behavior

Unfortunately, educators (and parents and citizens) too often seek corrective solutions to discipline issues rather than preventive and empowering modes of living (60). The Committee on Economic Development (17) and the Phi Delta Kappa study of students at risk (24, 51) both suggest that destructive behavioral syndromes are deeply rooted in our inadequate societal systems. In effect, communities that have values and structures that promote high crime rates also have the seeds that promote severe disruptive student behaviors (77). What is alarming is that these antisocial behaviors are growing at a pace that is eroding the functional integrity of urban, rural, suburban, and small town communities (7, 18, 44).

The need is urgent, then, for school-community arrangements that are conducive to promoting positive student behavior through strategies such as the following:

- Collaborative relationships that bring industry and business into the classroom and teachers into industrial and community settings for

adult and literacy education programs (76)

- Continuing community involvement in school improvement activities such as upgrading facilities and materials, as well as carrying out school review projects (62, 65)
- Cosponsorship of work and recreational programs that promote student involvement in productive and enjoyable activities (78)
- Partnership approaches to preventing and solving antisocial behavior problems such as the use of mentoring projects, school advisory councils, and teacher/parent involvement activities (62, 63)
- Joint planning and implementation of projects and activities that engage children and young people in caring for and improving the school/community environment (6).

Community involvement is essential to the development of viable programs for promoting positive student growth. The recent surge in drug abuse, single-parent teenage families, gang violence, and poverty-related problems is a clear signal for action. Community-school actions such as drug awareness programs, extended care activities, career development programs, adult mentoring systems, parental involvement, student support groups, and community safety teams are powerful modes of preventing the erosion of school and community life. The key to preventing school vandalism and severe discipline issues resides in positive leadership in both the school and the community (13, 21, 78).

Citizen attitudes toward the school are significantly related to the way students respond to their educational and social experiences. Unrealistic expectations, negative attitudes, and nonsupportive orientations toward the school invite apathy and cynicism among students (62). School involvement groups can empower the community through the active involvement of all citizens in positive actions that create a shared-ownership psychology (45). Community actions that have proven successful in improving citizen perceptions of schools include media spots on successful classroom teaching, recognition of student achievements, deployment of community resources to enrich school programs, involvement of citizens in positive experiences in the schools, and the use of citizen support groups (65).

Toward a Proactive Discipline Ecology

The rise of discipline-related problems in schools (now more than a decade old) is clearly rooted in the erosion of the larger human ecology (6). Like a hidden cancer, poverty among children (especially those under six), a rising crime rate, pervasive drug sales, poor support for schools and teachers, and an increasing mismatch between healthy

family life and social and economic goals, have created a fragile and often hostile human arena (1, 7, 48). This press of degrading social influences can be altered through school-family-community commitments. All citizens can help bring about improvement in these areas by (1) advocating an insured economic and health system that secures the physical and emotional well-being of our children and young people; (2) participating in efforts to increase the presence of positive adult role models in the lives of children and young people; and (3) promoting increased societal support for safe, secure, and meaningful school and community arrangements (65).

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